

“A Wonder-Full Christmas”

What an amazing story! Some shepherd who were watching their flocks by night were met by a bright light and by an angel and a whole heavenly host proclaiming and singing the tremendous news that unto them a Savior had been born who was Christ the Lord.

"They were filled with fear," says the scripture. After getting over the original terror and shock of being met by angels, the shepherds's fear gave way to sheer wonder and astonishment. Before hurrying off to Bethlehem to see what had taken place, they must have stood there for awhile, dumbfounded and awestruck – lost in the wonder of it all.

We've all had those wondrous “wow” moments of life, haven't we? – those awestruck moments that simply take your breath away. The moment when you first laid eyes upon your newborn child. The breath taking beauty of Hurricane Ridge on a clear day. Your first visit to the Grand Canyon.

I had a wow moment just this morning as I came to church. Driving down Nelson Hill towards church, the whole snowy Olympic Mountain range was visible against a vivid blue sky, and below the mountain range, where you normally see the sound, was an expansive bank of white fog – which served to only magnify the height and grandeur of the Olympics above. Wow, I said to myself as I pulled into church, do I live in a beautiful part of the country or what?

Sad to say, if we are not careful, it is possible to lose our capacity for wonder, taking the beauty in life for granted.

A group traveling by train through the Rocky Mountains was thrilled and visibly moved by the magnificent panorama. A woman on the train with them hardly raised her eyes from her book, and when she was asked why, she explained, “This is the 13th time I have crossed the mountains. The first time I could not keep the tears from rolling down my cheeks, so impressed was I. But now I have known it so well that I frequently go through the whole range with scarcely a glance out the window.” Her sense of wonder was gone and she no long recognized the grandeur of the breath-taking beauty around her.

The same thing can happen with regard to the marvel, the mystery and the majesty of God and the wonder of Christmas.

We all know the Christmas story – no grander, more beautiful story is told. But heaven help us if you and I ever allow that story become “old hat” and dull.

Peter Marshall, the famous Presbyterian minister once said: *“When Christmas doesn't make your heart swell up until it nearly bursts and fills your eyes with tears and make you all soft and warm inside...then you will know that something inside you is dead.”*

The story of God walking down the paths of time into this world will stagger the imagination of anyone who takes time to think about it. Imagine! God became a human being like you and me; ate and drank, got tired, wept -- experiencing all that we do. He personally visited our planet and walked our streets and he walks with us still: Jesus, Emmanuel -- God with us -- all in order that we might be saved from

our sins and have life and know it abundantly. That's truly cause for astonishment! As the little boy in Sunday school put it, "God wonders me!"

The shepherds were alive and wide-eyed with wonder. Talk about a 'wow' experience! They were amazed that God would care enough about them that they (of all people!) should be among the first to hear the news of the Savior's birth. They were astonished that God would break into this world -as a baby in a manger - and involve himself in their problems and concerns, bringing light into their darkness. These shepherds – regarded as outcasts by many - felt loved and valued by God himself. What a wonder!

We can all nurture our capacity for wonder. We were all children once and when it comes to Christmas, we can all be children again. Get in touch with your inner child. Be amazed. Let Christmas fill you with wonder. Take time just to allow the story to sink in.

Ah, but maybe that's the rub: no time.

There is a story of a mother who, typical of last-minute Christmas shoppers, was running furiously from store to store. Suddenly she became aware that the little hand of her three year old son was no longer clutched in hers. In a panic she retraced her steps and found him standing with his little nose pressed against a frosty window. He was gazing at a manger scene. Hearing his mother's near hysterical call, he turned and shouted with innocent glee, "*Look, Mommy! It's a Jesus-baby Jesus in the hay.*" With obvious indifference to his joy and wonder, she impatiently jerked him away, saying, "*We don't have time for that!*"

Sometimes we are so busy and distracted in life that we have no time for wonder. No time to fully appreciate the story and take in what it all means. No time simply to linger at the manger – to stop and think and pray – and therefore, to be amazed. I pray that we will all take time tonight and during this Christmas season to linger over the story, relishing its meaning, allowing its beauty to captivate us afresh. Coming here, to God's house, was a good choice. What an amazing God we have! Who would have thought God would go to such lengths to be with us and to save us all. God wonders us!

Luke tells us that after the shepherds visited the manger, "*they returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen.*" They returned different people with more hope, more love, and more joy in their hearts. Life, for them, would never be the same.

I pray that you and I will come away from the manger this year filled with lasting wonder and praise. I pray that we, like the shepherd of old, will experience a new kind of joy, a renewed sense of purpose, and a more intimate relationship with the One who is called Emmanuel: God with us! Amen.